

THE
SECOND
SPEECH
OF

Nath. Briffey Halbed, M.P.

DELIVERED IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS,

TUESDAY APRIL 21, 1795,

RESPECTING THE CONFINEMENT OF

MR. BROTHERS,

THE PROPHET.

London:

PRINTED FOR G. RIEBAU, No. 439, STRAND.

1795.



MR. HALHED'S

SECOND SPEECH.

WHEN I had the honour to make a motion in the House, this day three weeks, relative to the books written by Mr. Brothers, it cannot be supposed that the actual situation of the author was out of my mind—very far from it. I had, indeed, on that day, designed to bring forward the subject in the form and manner in which I now present it; but altered my plan, in consequence of advice from an honourable member, my very particular friend, and whose opinion has always great weight with me. When I had so deviated from my original idea, I had the misfortune to be told, by the most respectable and most respected authority in this House, that the motion I was then about to make was exceedingly objectionable in point of matter. In this situation, which way can I turn myself? What rule shall I adopt for my conduct? None, none but my own sense of duty.

A conscientious discharge of those functions which the British Constitution, so justly venerated

by all of us, has consigned to that branch of the Legislature of which I form an unworthy part, must and shall be my guide. Independent by principle, and attached to no party, I will not flinch from the task imposed on me by circumstances, or pointed out to me by Providence: but I will certainly do every conciliatory argument, and in the very spirit of humility, endeavour to divest disapprobation of its frown, and disarm prejudice of its severity.

Sir, the papers which according to my notice of yesterday, I shall this day move to be laid on your Table, are, 1st. A copy of the information warrant from the Secretary of State for the Home Department, by which Richard Brothers was arrested on the 4th of last month, on suspicion of treasonable practices, together with a copy of the said warrant. 2dly. His examination before the Privy Council. And 3dly. the minute of the whole proceedings held at the King's Arms Tavern, Palace Yard, on a writ *de Lunatico inquirendo*, together with the verdict of the Jury there impanelled. If all, or any of these papers are granted, on them I mean to ground a motion for the House to resolve itself into a Committee, to take the whole matter into consideration, and give such relief thereon, as in its wisdom it shall deem requisite: and as to-morrow is an open day, I hope I shall be indulged with so favourable an opportunity for my purpose.

When I reflect on the subject of my motion of the 31st March, I own I am both surprised and concerned that it should have experienced so little attention. For it must have been demonstrably evident that I could have no private or personal views

views in the business, even if I had not so pointedly disclaimed them. And that the disregard, dislike, contempt, and abhorrence with which I have heard the books alluded to occasionally branded, are either just nor reasonable, I am still so ignorant or so obstinate as not to comprehend. But when I consider the exceeding variety of tempers, dispositions, characters, and pursuits necessarily existing among so many different persons, that I should not have found one gentleman to second me, is, I confess, a subject of extreme astonishment. For when a topic, pregnant with religious ideas, and *professedly* (even if we suppose it mistakenly) founded on the grand basis of Christianity, claimed nothing more than a deliberate discussion, where were the promoters of the Sunday Reform Bill? When the cause of a suffering and persecuted individual pressed (though obliquely, and by insinuation only) on the notice of the House, where were the meritorious defenders of Muir and Palmer? When dangers (however visionary) were announced as threatening this Parliament and this nation, where were the indefatigable detectors of the affiliated democratic Societies? When imputed insanity was proposed for consideration, where were the invincible bulwarks that preserved regal delirium from an intrusive Regency? When the subject of universal peace was offered as a matter of calm reflection, where were all the strenuous and able opposers of the present calamitous war? When bolts and bars, imprisonment and chains, were pathetically held up to view for commiseration and relief, where were the persevering denunciators of the African Slave Trade? Alas! alas! they must have all been sick, or sleeping, or peradventure on a journey.

Well,

Well, Sir, though my Motion of that day *did* thus surprisingly fall to the ground, I most implicitly trust it did not wholly fail of its intended effect. Many Gentlemen, I am convinced, *did* read Mr. Brothers's books during the interval of the recess, and some I knew to have applied for and received them from the author himself previously to that period. Wherefore, though by my former ill success, I am precluded from *direct* application to the contents of those books, I am perfectly warrantable in alluding to them, as of public notoriety : and indeed few compositions, since printing was first invented, have excited more general attention. Any man who considers my former motion, must at once discover that it led to those which I presume to offer this day : and I should have thought myself unpardonably negligent of my duty, whether as a Legislator or a Christian, if I had suffered the business to evaporate after once taking it up, without at least straining every nerve to procure some substantial redress for the person who is known to have been the ultimate object of my exertions.

Had I in the former case succeeded, it would have been very natural, Sir, that I should beg of the House at large, to point out any passage in the books I have mentioned, from whence the slightest tendency of a treasonable intention could be inferred. I myself know of none. That alone which had been hinted to me, and which I had any reason to suspect as in the remotest degree liable to such an imputation, I clearly explained upon the former occasion. And the more pointedly to evince my perfect conviction of the innocence of these books, as far as treason is concerned, I here, in the face of the House adopt the whole
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of them as my own. I subscribe to every assertion in them from the first to the last ; I make myself a conscious, a willing accomplice to all the guilt contained in them—“ *Habetis confitentem reum,*” and I desire nothing more than to be proceeded against legally and up to final judgment and sentence upon those grounds.

If now there be Treason lurking in these publications, I am committed beyond all evasion, and Gentlemen know what to think of me : but I am firmly convinced no such accusation can be thought to attach, and that I am in no danger. And as, I trust, that hitherto, and up to the very instant of these assertions, I have ever maintained the character of a faithful subject, and true to my oath of allegiance, I shall, for the present, venture to assume it as a fact, that the *writings* in question, *as far as they go*, are not treasonable. Their author then must have incurred this dreadful imputation from some other circumstance. Is it offensive, is it indecent, is it unparliamentary, to enquire of what nature these damning circumstances may be ?---for I neither know, nor have heard, nor can possibly conjecture any one. Last year, when various persons were taken up by a similar interference of the Executive Power, we were fairly and candidly told the grounds of their arrest ; the formation of, or connection with popular societies, formed on principles resembling those of the Jacobin Clubs in France, and deemed to be equally subversive of all regular government, were the ostensible plea of their imprisonment. Here is a ground to stand upon. Here is a fact held up to the warning of every one. To be Member of a Club, or at least of a certain description of Club, subjects a man to the suspicion of

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of treasonable practices. Was Mr. Brothers institutor of any such Club ? Was he even Member of any Club at all ? I answer, authoritatively, No. Well, but it may be said, if a number of persons be collected together, even without the form or name of a Club, treason may still be disseminated at such assembly. If the names of President, or Chairman, and Secretary, be commuted for those of Minister and Clerk, the mischief may be no less serious and no less apparent. For do we not know, that Oliver Cromwell was himself a Preacher, and subverted the Constitutional Government of the country by means of Field Preachers ? I answer, Mr. Brothers was no Preacher : he never assembled, nor thought of assembling any congregation whatever ; and he had neither more intention nor more appearance of collecting an assembly for seditious purposes, or for any purpose whatever beyond that of general conversation, than you, Sir, have at your Levee, or the President of the Royal Society at his Breakfasts.

Mr. Brothers was generally at home a few hours in the morning. Inclination, curiosity, example, occasionally belief in his predictions, induced various persons to call upon him, and he was never denied to them. Members of Parliament and Ladies of Quality have met there without blushing, and without offence. Sometimes he was civilly treated, very often cavilled at, and not seldom abused ; but he was uniformly calm, obliging, and consistent with all. In this part, therefore, of his conduct I am totally at a loss to discover any outlines of the traitor ; and if others, more quick-sighted than myself, have seen deeper into this particular, I hope it will be communicated to us this day for general information. Arguing

guing however, from my own personal knowledge of him, as far as it goes, I assert with no leis boldness of his way of living than of his books, that no treason whatever can be detected in either.

It follows, that if there be no treason, there must be much insanity about him. For something, undoubtedly, we must assume as the cause, originally of his arrest, and hitherto of his imprisonment. By what test shall we try him on this head ? I sincerely hope not by the investigation at the King's Arms Tavern ; for if the proceedings which I mean to move for, are fairly brought forward, as doubtless they will be, I am sure I shall prove the evidence, on that head, to have been compleatly insufficient and nugatory.

Now, Sir, if the books I formerly moved for, lay at present upon your Table, I would desire neither more nor better evidence than they contain, to evince, to the satisfaction of every reasonable man, that the writer has not the slightest tincture of insanity about him. What is the object professedly proposed by those books ? the restoration of Peace. From one end to the other, in every page, and in every sentence, we may visibly trace this one grand prominent feature. Sometimes it is urged on the score of political advantage, sometimes on principles of religious duty : here it is recommended by a striking picture of its beneficial consequences, there contrasted by a terrific display of the calamities of war : now it is recommended by intreaty, then inforced by denunciations. The author shifts his arguments, and diversifies his representations, to suit every species of understanding, and accommodate himself to all the various classes of his readers ; and

is this madness? Is that versatility of thought and sentiment, which in all other writers is deemed one of the first essentials of genius, to be wantonly and unfeelingly misconstrued as the wandering of deranged intellect, because it may not exactly suit the temper of the times? Forbid it every principle of Virtue and Justice; forbid it every spark of Humanity and Philanthropy! In proof of what I have here faintly attempted to describe, I might appeal to a thousand passages scattered over every part of Mr. Brothers's works; but I will produce only one; it is in the 41st page of the second book, and a more striking example of found abilities and correct imagination, I am well persuaded, could no where be selected from *Demosthenes* or *Cicero*, or any of the best human authors, ancient or modern. It is a comment on the 27th verse of the 7th chapter of *Daniel*.

“ And the Kingdom and Dominion, and the greatness (*meaning the power*) of all the Kingdoms under the whole Heaven, will be given to the people and saints of the Most High: his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions must serve and obey him.

“ This is that real kingdom of heaven, of Christianity in practice to believe and obey God, which was commanded by Christ to preserve the soul of man, and a due knowledge of himself; preached by the Apostles, and through them the foundation of it laid in all nations; though determined from the first transgression of Adam, and begun more than seventeen hundred years ago with all the materials ready prepared, from the multiplied interruptions of war and other causes incident to human kingdoms, like the second temple Jerusalem—long in building—This mighty

mighty Structure is not finished yet. This is that Stone cut out without hands, mentioned by the Prophet Daniel in his second chapter, 34th and 35th verses, which breaks the head and the feet, the gold and the silver, the brass, the iron, and the clay, of the Great Image of Human Power to pieces : and this is the kingdom mentioned by the same prophet in the 44th verse following, which is to break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms ; but which is to remain itself for ever. The name of this universal Kingdom is PEACE ;— It has the blessed Gospel for its Government, and the Lord God for its King.”

In what I have taken the liberty to state to the House on the present occasion, I hope, Sir, I shall not be so widely misunderstood, as if I endeavoured to throw an odium, or set up an accusation against any of the members of administration, or any other person of respectability whatever. I have no such intention. But if spits and informers, basely stabbing a man’s fair fame in the dark, have misled the candid and unsuspecting minds of liberal gentlemen, let us unmask their hypocrisy, and rescue their victim from unmerited punishment. If medical pretenders, by reliance on visionary theories, or with a deep-laid plot of systematic villainy, have conspired to cry down a man’s intellect, and rob him of heaven’s choicest inheritance, his sanity of understanding, let us expose their ignorance or chastise their depravity by effectual interference. All I wish, is, to procure redress for an undeserving sufferer as I deem him, or to gain some conviction of the justice of his sufferings. And that this, Sir, is not an easy matter, nor a matter attainable through any regular official channel, I hope to make fully evident ; nor indeed do I know any channel, but that of

the inquisitorial authority of this House, by which the relief I speak of, which gentlemen will allow must necessarily be prompt, if we would have it efficacious, can possibly be obtained. The person in question is, as a suspected traitor, in the power of the secretary of state—as a lunatic he is immediately under the Lord Chancellor. If I apply to chancery, I must expect to be told he is a *state prisoner under warrant from government* for treasonable practices. If I refer to the Secretary of State's office, I shall have the same answer as given to another friend of his, “that he is not properly under that department, but as a lunatic is to be sent to some hospital, where, *perhaps*, by leave of the governor, *I may be permitted to see him.*” Between these two noble personages, while I am bandied about as a shuttlecock, Mr. Brothers may be transferred to a third or a fourth department, whither all my industry may be exerted in vain to trace him. All I require, therefore, is to discover with precision, whether this Mr. Brothers be a traitor or a lunatic. He may possibly be neither: but it is morally certain he cannot be both. I neither wish to palliate any crimes he may have committed, nor to screen him from any merited punishment of the law.

A few words more, Sir, and I have done. I have caused to be delivered at the door a printed paper, written, I confess, partly on another subject of personal controversy, though bearing immediately also on my present Motion; it is an *Essay on the Slain Lamb of the Revelations*. I most sincerely apologize for its intrusion, and I hope I shall be forgiven, when I mention that it is done precisely for the purpose of taking shame to myself, in having there inserted a proposition which is not warranted by fact. As

As far as that assertion goes, I can say nothing in my own defence. I admit it to be false, and I ask pardon for its insertion. I have there said, that "the verdict of Lunacy was brought in at the very Meeting before ever the person to be decided on was examined at all;" and I now know that his examination was previous to the verdict—they had only made up their minds to it, before they saw him. *I eat my words.*

Now with respect to the documents which I move for, they cannot, I think, betray any secrets of state. For if there exists a plot of which government wish to explore the different ramifications, before they promulgate their information, I think the verdict of Lunacy is effectually done away. A conspiracy headed by a madman can be no very tremendous object, nor do I think his accomplices could have so long lain hid, when their chief was in confinement. And if this supposed conspiracy lay in his books, why, after the open warning I gave three weeks ago, has no step been taken to impede their circulation?

The examination before the privy council I am pretty well assured, may be published without any danger. All was politeness, candour, and good sense in that quarter: and though curiosity might be gratified by the publication, no new article would from thence be added to the catalogue of existing treasons.

Of the verdict of Insanity I have little to say. The jurymen themselves are not very consistent in their accounts of it, which may a little palliate the error I have acknowledged; but if their proceedings be granted to my motion, opinion then will have something solid to rest on.

I now conclude, most earnestly entreating gentlemen

lemen to consider themselves, as Representatives of the whole British nation, to be meritoriously employed in redressing, where it may be possible, the accidental oppressions of any one British individual, however obscure. And I hope that a man who has creditably served his king and country in the royal navy, the pride and bulwark of the empire, will never appeal in vain to a British House, of Commons."

I therefore move "that a copy of the warrant of the Secretary of State for the apprehending of RICHARD BROTHERS, be laid before this House, together with a copy of the information on which the warrant was grounded.

Mr. HALHED having given in his motion, the Speaker asked, who seconds this motion? There being no answer, the Speaker said, as this motion is not seconded, it cannot be put from the chair.



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